



# THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON AUTISM

*“Supporting individuals with autism and their families:  
forging new directions for real change”*

Commission Overview & Background Information

## COMMISSIONERS

Hon. Darrell Steinberg  
Chair

Dr. Barbara Firestone  
Vice-Chair

Ms. Cindy Asner

Ms. Magdalena  
Beltran-del Olmo

Mr. Stephen Beneto

Ms. Maureen Burness

Dr. Rudy Castruita

Dr. David Feinberg

Dr. Ronald Huff

Mr. David Kears

Dr. Lynn Koegel

Ms. Areva Martin, Esq.

Mr. Rick Rollens

Mr. Kenneth Simril

Ms. Eleni  
Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis

Dr. Albert Wang

Sue North, Exec. Director

## AUTISM FACTS

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the fastest growing serious developmental disability in the United States. It is more prevalent than childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes, and pediatric AIDS combined.
- California's autism caseload increased by 634% between 1987 and 2002.
- The number of students with autism enrolled in grades K-12 in California schools has increased over 1,000% during the past 22 years.
- The economic impact of autism in the United States is more than \$90 billion annually and is expected to more than double in the next decade.

## “WHAT IS THE COMMISSION?”

The Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism was established by the California Legislature in 2005 without a single dissenting vote and strong bipartisan support. Its goal is to have direct impact on the needs of children and adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD.) Authored by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland, 9th District), the resolution (SCR 51) created a 16-member Commission, with 8 members appointed by the Assembly Speaker, and 8-members appointed by the Senate Rules Committee. The Commission's work is supported by the Legislature and the CA Commission on Autism Foundation.

## “ROLE OF THE COMMISSION”

The Commission's vision is to provide trailblazing leadership for the state and the nation in the areas of policy, legislation and regulations that will improve the lives of individuals with ASD and their families. Thus, the Commission will identify gaps in programs, services, and funding related to early identification; education; and successful transition of individuals into community-based settings and will provide recommendations to close the gaps. The Commission will submit its findings and recommendations to the Legislature and Governor by Sept. 2007.

## “WHO IS THE COMMISSION?”

“The Commission provides an opportunity for the legislature to link the science, knowledge, and best practices of autism to public policy,” said Senate President pro Tem Don Perata after the resolution passed the Senate. Therefore, its members include representatives of the public and private sectors, educators, physicians, and parents/advocates of children and adults with ASD. The Commission is led by Senator Darrell Steinberg, Chair (D-6th District); and Dr. Barbara Firestone, Vice-Chair (President & CEO, The Help Group.)

## “ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE”

The Commission has established a strategic plan that is focused on a “strength-based approach” that will improve services and supports for individuals with ASD, and their families, by integrating validated best-practices with family-focused, community-based providers and systems of care. Members of the Commission's 3 Task Force Groups (Early Identification & Intervention; Education & Professional Development; Transitional Services & Supports) have worked extensively during the past several months and their preliminary findings and recommendations were presented to the Commission on March 1, 2007. Regional meetings are currently in progress to vet these findings, obtain public input, and engage families, advocates, community organizations, and other stakeholders in the Commission's future activities.

Additional information on the Autism Commission is available at its web site:  
<http://senweb03.senate.ca.gov/autism/>